

Christian, You Can Be Generous!

(2 Corinthians 9:8–11) ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

In Christ Jesus, whose generosity has made us all eternally rich, dear fellow redeemed,

Has something like this ever happened in your home? Dad walks into the kitchen where he finds his two young boys, ages 7 and 5, arguing over a chocolate chip cookie. “Boys,” says dad, “stop your fighting! There are two cookies, one for each of you.” “But, dad,” says the oldest, “one of the cookies is bigger than the other and we both want it.” Dad, seeing an opportunity to teach a lesson, says to his sons, “Think of Jesus, how loving and generous he is. He wouldn’t argue. He’d say to his brother, “You go ahead and take the big cookie. I’m happy to have the smaller one.” Certain he had made his point, Dad looked at his two boys and asked, “Do you understand?” The oldest was the first to shake his head yes. And then, without missing a beat, he turned to his younger brother and said, “You can be Jesus.”

It’s an amusing story, but not so amusing is the fact that the same selfish attitude is alive and well in the heart of each and every one of us sinners. We’re all for generosity when it’s the other guy who’s being generous. But not so much when it comes to our own generosity.

This was certainly the case when it came to the sinner-saints living in Corinth. Months earlier, Paul had asked them to take up a relief offering for the Christians living in Jerusalem who were suffering the effects of a severe famine. The Corinthian Christians got right to work, making plans to gather their gifts. But now, many months later, it seems that the offering had never made it out of the planning stages. Paul told the Corinthians all about the generosity of the Christians living in Macedonia and Galatia. And while the Corinthians may have been happy to hear such news, they themselves apparently had nothing to offer by way of a gift. Knowing their situation, Paul quickly realized that the Corinthians’ problem wasn’t financial. It was spiritual. They had plenty to offer. What they lacked was the Christ-like attitude that the dad of our story was trying to teach his two sons – the same attitude that Paul seeks to impart to everyone who reads his words to the Corinthians, these words from verse 11 of our text where Paul says, **Christian, You Can Be Generous! 1) By God’s Providence, 2) Because of God’s Grace, 3) Always to God’s Glory.**

We can be generous! That is encouraging to hear, isn’t it? Because generosity doesn’t come naturally to any of us. It wasn’t in our DNA at the time of our birth. I’m reminded of JD Rockefeller, perhaps the richest American to have ever lived. He was once asked how much money is enough. His answer: “One dollar more.” This is the mindset we are all born with. Rather than a mindset of generosity, we’re born with the mindset of scarcity – a mindset that tells us we don’t ever have enough, enough chocolate chip cookie, enough time, enough energy, enough money. We’re always a little short of everything. Now maybe we really believe this to be true, but it is not. Instead, it’s a damning lie, one of Satan’s oldest and biggest lies. How do I know? God says so right here in these words that he’s given Paul to write: **And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8).** Listen to how Paul drives home this truth: “...all things at all times, having

all that you need...” Paul is talking about the generous way in which God provides for our every need. This is called God’s “providence.” By his providence God makes sure that we have exactly what we need exactly when we need it.

Notice, Paul doesn’t say that God gives us everything that we want when we want it. That’s a different story – the story of an all-knowing, all-loving Father who has pledged himself to act always and only in our best interest. Our heavenly Father can’t, he won’t give us something that he knows would prove harmful to us, no matter how desperately we want it. When it comes to our needs, however, these he supplies abundantly, so abundantly, that from our surplus we can generously care for others.

You saw this in our gospel reading for today. Jesus instructs his disciples to feed the thousands of people who have shown up to hear the Savior speak. The disciples quickly point out that they can’t oblige Jesus because they don’t have enough. They’re more than a little short on food. What does Jesus do? He assures them that that the five loaves of bread and two fish they do have will be great plenty. And so it was. Thousands had their fill and still there were 12 baskets of leftovers. Makes you think of Paul’s words, doesn’t it? “All things, at all times, having all that you need.”

But you might point out that what Jesus did was miraculous. Of course it was. You know what else is miraculous? It’s a miracle of God when he takes a cold, dead, selfish heart and turns it into a warm living heart that beats with loving generosity. This is a miracle that is repeated again and again throughout the ages of time wherever God’s gospel is proclaimed. In fact, so that we understand that this is not some strange or rare event, Paul quotes from Psalm 112: **As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”** “They” is a reference to God’s Old Testament people who trusted in God’s promises. They regularly, repeatedly, took the gifts they received from God and shared them with others. This generosity flowed from and was a reflection of their “righteousness,” which is the term that the Bible uses to describe the right relationship they enjoyed with God. Please understand, their generosity did not make them righteous. God declared them righteous. Their generosity was simply the evidence of the heart transplant God had worked in them through his gospel.

So where does that leave me? I don’t know about you, but I often struggle to be generous. Too often I suffer from that mindset of scarcity. I buy into Satan’s lie and convince myself that I always seem to be running a little short of everything – short enough, at least, that I find it very easy to justify my selfish impulses. “I’d like to find the time to volunteer.” I tell myself, “But I better bank those hours instead. Who knows what wrench tomorrow will throw into my plans? I may need those hours for myself.” Likewise, I tell myself, “I’d like to help out with a donation, but what if I need those dollars for some unforeseen expense? Maybe next time.”

On the surface my caution may not seem unreasonable. Lots of people think the same way. Maybe you have similar thoughts. But if I’m being completely honest with myself – about myself and my sin, I have to confess that no small amount of my caution comes down to sinful worry and fear, both of which come straight from my lack of trust in God and his promises. You’ll have to decide if the same goes for you. But here’s how it plays out in my head and heart. I’m afraid, I worry that God may not keep his promise to supply my future needs. Now, I have absolutely nothing to base this fear on. In fact, I can’t think of one day in my life when God failed to keep his promise. I’ve never gone hungry. I’ve never gone one day without a roof over my head. It is God alone who has brought me safely to this day. The fact that you’re sitting here means he’s done the same for you. But what if his generosity stops with the end of this day? What if he determines that I don’t deserve his help tomorrow? **AND THERE IT IS** – the real cause of all my doubt and fear – the notion that somehow God’s promised blessings depend on me and my worthiness. This is the biggest lie of them all!

God’s generosity has nothing to do with us and our worthiness. This is all about God and the nature of his love – love that gives without expecting anything in return. Our English translation

reads: “God is able to bless you abundantly.” The Greek says, “God is able to make his grace superabound to you.” -- not just abound but superabound. Grace, by its very definition is God’s undeserved love for us. God in this grace showers us with gifts, including his greatest gift, that of his own Son who became our Substitute to save us from our sin’s guilt and punishment. Paul speaks of the Savior’s own generosity in this same letter to the Corinthians when he writes in the chapter prior to our text: **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9).** Paul pictures for us our Savior, leaving the riches and security of heaven in order to trade places with us hell-bound, bankrupt sinners. Jesus gathers all his holiness and deposits all of it into our spiritual bank accounts, even as he stands in for us and takes ownership of all our sin-debt before God – a debt that can only be settled in the debtors’ prison of hell. There he languishes until finally it is finished. God’s wrath over sin and sinners is satisfied. There can be no doubt of this because the One who became the Chief of Sinners in our place has not only been released from hell but from the grave as well! He lives! He lives to see and celebrate how the righteousness he has gifted to us covers our selfishness and stinginess, our doubts and fears and all our sin and makes us just as righteous and just as generous in God’s eyes as Jesus himself.

This changes everything, doesn’t it? We unworthy sinners can count on God, not only to forgive us, but also to bless and keep us in superabundance because of Jesus and what his grace has done for us. Don’t you love how Paul says this in Romans 8:32 **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** Christians, as we lose ourselves in these wonderful promises of God’s grace, our guilt goes away, our doubts diminish, and our own generosity grows. Christian, you can be generous by God’s providence, because of God’s grace, always to God’s glory!

Listen to how Paul summarizes these truths in the closing verses of our text: **Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:10-11).** Paul has no intention of shaming any of us into becoming more generous. Shame is a terrible motivator. Instead, Paul is pointing us to the wonders of God’s grace, confident that as we meditate each day on the unfailing, unchanging nature of God’s love for us in Christ, God himself will grow our faith and with it harvest of our righteousness. Or to put it another way, as we grow more and more confident in God’s desire and ability to bless us, we’ll find it easier and easier to thank God for his love by sharing what he’s given us with others. The result of God’s work within us will be thanksgiving to God, our own thanksgiving and that of the people who come to realize that God is meeting their physical and spiritual needs through the generosity that God alone has generated in us. Here you might think of how God uses our thank offerings to plant his gospel in the hearts of people near and far.

All of this gives new meaning to the words which that older brother spoke to the younger as they battled for the bigger cookie: “You can be Jesus.” Christian, you can be Jesus, never perfectly, of course. But with his holiness covering you and his love filling you, you can be the reflection of his love and generosity every day for the people you know and those you may meet, if not here on earth, then one day in heaven, thanks to the grace that God shows all of us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.